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BY R. GERALD MCMURTRY



Reprinted from *The Filson Club History Quarterly*  
Louisville, Kentucky, April, 1934



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## James Buchanan in Kentucky, 1813\*

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While all the presidents of the United States have visited Kentucky, except George Washington, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson—and there is a possibility that Washington may have visited eastern Kentucky in his youth—the fact that James Buchanan lived there for a short time is not generally known. Furthermore, the fact that James Buchanan, who preceded Abraham Lincoln to the presidency, lived in Elizabethtown, the county seat of Hardin County, for several months within approximately twenty miles of the Lincoln home on Knob Creek while Lincoln resided there, has seldom been mentioned.<sup>1</sup>

A great amount of literature has been written about Lincoln in Hardin County, which, since its establishment in 1792, has the

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\*Since writing the following paper, steps have been taken to erect a Buchanan tablet, 11 by 19 inches, in Elizabethtown, April 23, 1934. *The Elizabethtown News* in its issue of February 6 publishes the following announcement:

A bronze tablet to the memory of James Buchanan, President of the United States, who lived in Hardin County, will be placed in the Courthouse yard in Elizabethtown on April 23, the anniversary of Buchanan's birth. Ceremonies will be in charge of the Hardin County Historical Society, which procured the tablet. An extensive program for the occasion will be arranged. The tablet has already been received, and is at the office of Dr. D. E. McClure, a member of the Society. It bears the following inscription:

James Buchanan / 15th President of the United States / resided for several months / at Elizabethtown in the year 1813 / where he served / as legal adviser in his father's / Western land litigations. / Hardin County Historical Society, 1934.

The tablet will be placed in the northwest corner of the Courtyard, across the walk from one to the memory of Abraham Lincoln. They direct attention to the fact that two future Presidents of the United States lived in Hardin County at the same time.

<sup>1</sup>Emmet V. Mittlebeeler in the Point of View Column of *The Louisville Courier-Journal*, cited in *The Filson Club History Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 4,

distinction of having had within its limits many great characters of both state and national importance. Original Hardin County, which derived its name from John Hardin, a Virginian who was murdered by the Indians the year of its establishment, embraced a large area, being approximately 140 miles long and 50 miles wide, and from its beginning proved to be very attractive to both settlers and land speculators.<sup>2</sup>

Captain Abraham Lincoln, the grandfather of the president, came into Kentucky as a settler, and his son, Thomas, made his first purchase of Kentucky real estate in Hardin County in the year 1803.<sup>3</sup> Thomas Lincoln engaged in many land transactions until the year 1816, when he left Kentucky, partly because of insecure land titles.<sup>4</sup> Members of other prominent pioneer families, such as the LaFollettes, Clarks, and Boones, likewise left Kentucky because of land difficulties.<sup>5</sup>

James Buchanan, Sr., the father of President Buchanan, fourteen years after the Lincoln migration to Kentucky, bought

October, 1932, page 420. The *Courier-Journal*, on May 3, 1932, in the same column, published a letter by Otis M. Mather on "The Buchanans in Kentucky."

In addition to Hardin County's two succeeding presidents of the United States, whose terms ran from 1857 to 1865, records show that Kentucky Governors James Proctor Knott, Simon Bolivar Buckner, and John Young Brown, whose terms ran from 1883 to 1895, all lived for a time in Hardin County and succeeded each other to that position. Harry A. Sommers' "History of Elizabethtown," Chapter XLVIII. Sommers' history extends from 1869 to 1921. It was published in the *Elizabethtown News* in installments of fifty-eight chapters, the first appearing in the issue of Friday, May 27, 1921. Arrangements have been made whereby this history will be published in book form.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Allen Goodson: *Hardin's Fort and Its Founder*, page 3.

Samuel Haycraft: *History of Elizabethtown, Kentucky and Its Surroundings*, page 21. This history was written in 1869 and published in book form (188 pages) in 1921, by The Woman's Club of Elizabethtown. Samuel Haycraft, a son of pioneer Samuel Haycraft, was born in Elizabethtown in 1795 and died there in 1878. His *History of Elizabethtown* was first published in the *Elizabethtown News* in 1869 and republished in that paper in 1889-90.

<sup>3</sup> Captain Abraham Lincoln with his family migrated from Virginia to Kentucky in the year 1782. Thomas Lincoln purchased, on September 2, 1803, from John T. Stater, for £118, 230 acres of land in Hardin County located on Mill Creek. Louis A. Warren: *Lincoln's Parentage and Childhood*, page 47.

<sup>4</sup> When Abraham Lincoln wrote his autobiography for John L. Scripps, he said: "From this place [Knob Creek Farm] he [Thomas Lincoln] removed to what is now Spencer County, Indiana, in the autumn of 1816, Abraham then being in his eighth year. This removal was partly on account of slavery, but chiefly on account of the difficulty in land titles." Warren's *Lincoln's Parentage and Childhood*, page 121. Nicolay and Hay, *Abraham Lincoln, Complete Works*, Vol. I, pages 638-644.

<sup>5</sup> Jesse LaFollette, the grandfather of Senator Robert M. LaFollette, of Wisconsin, was a neighbor of Thomas Lincoln on Knob Creek in Hardin County, Kentucky. The western ancestor of Senator William E. Borah, of Idaho, lived at a point near Mammoth Cave in Kentucky, about forty miles south of where Lincoln was born. The Lincoln, LaFollette and Borah families all lived in Kentucky at the same time. Warren Files, Lincoln National Life Foundation, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

a landed estate in Hardin County, causing his interest in the State to become that of a land speculator. The Lincoln and Buchanan connection with Hardin County resulted in events which gave this county the unique distinction of having, for several months in the year 1813, two future presidents living within its boundaries.

The father of James Buchanan, upon arriving in this country from Ireland in the year 1783, at the age of twenty-three years, resided a short time in Philadelphia and a few months later removed to Stony Batter, Franklin County, Pennsylvania.\* In 1788 he married Elizabeth Speer, and their son, James, was born April 23, 1791. He undoubtedly came in contact with numerous persons who were moving West and was most likely induced by a land agent to purchase Kentucky real estate.

As a rule Pennsylvanians were heavy purchasers of land in Kentucky, and Buchanan's acreage was approximately as great as were the purchases of the Lincolns. Many estates at this early date in Kentucky history literally ran into thousands of acres, but because James Buchanan, Sr., did not migrate to the West, his holdings were probably bought more conservatively in proportion to his estate than were the investments of Captain Lincoln.

Records in the Hardin County Court House (Deed Book A, page 233) show that on March 15, 1796, James Buchanan, of Franklin County, Pennsylvania, became a part owner with James Dickey of 3,610 acres of land located in Hardin County. This property was purchased at one dollar per acre, and the deed was made to James Buchanan, Sr., and James Dickey, both of Pennsylvania, by Michael Campbell and his wife, Sarah Campbell, and Charles Campbell, all of Nelson County. The deed to this property contains the name of John Speer, a witness to the proceedings, who was most likely the father or brother of Elizabeth Speer, the wife of James Buchanan, Sr. The deed was executed March 29, 1796, before James Reddle, of Pennsylvania,

\*The father of President Buchanan was descended from Thomas Buchanan of Romelton County, Donegal, Ireland. *History of Strathendrick*, by J. Guthrie Smith, of Glasgow, Scotland. There does not appear to be proof that any "brothers or sisters" of James Buchanan, Sr., came to America. Browning's *Americans of Royal Descent* (1882), pages 48-49. It is highly improbable that the early Kentucky Buchanans, principally of Mercer and Meade Counties, were related in any way to President Buchanan. Browning's *Americans of Royal Descent* says, "The degree of relationship between President James Buchanan and the brothers, Thomas and Alexander, is so slight as to be negligible."

president of the several Courts of Common Pleas in the circuit consisting of Franklin, Bedford, Huntingdon, and Mifflin counties. This land was Buchanan's first investment in Kentucky.

The 3,610-acre tract is described as being located in Hardin County, two hundred poles below the mouth of Doe Run on the bank of the Ohio River, running to the line of John May's 3,000-acre survey, the line crossing the upper side of the mouth of Doe Run several times.<sup>7</sup> This property, then in original Hardin County, is today located in Meade County.<sup>8</sup> Another tract in which Buchanan had an interest contained 5,900 acres and is described as being on both sides of Nolin River in Hardin County; the lines ran near the mouth of the Big Sandy Spring and below the mouth of Valley Creek and near Nolin Creek.

Little documentary evidence has been found concerning the Buchanan land immediately after the sale of the tract in 1796. No litigation occurred until seven years after the purchase; the property up to this time was probably considered a good investment. The owners most likely hoped, after the further settlement of Kentucky, to sell the land at a handsome profit. A large net return probably would have been realized had not incompetent executors of estates and insecure property titles entered into the bargain.

The land in which James Buchanan, James Dickey, and Robert Johnson, a later partner, had invested their money was originally in the possession of John LaRue (II), who died in the year 1792.<sup>9</sup> In his will he appointed three executors—Isaac LaRue, Robert Hodgins, and Philip Phillips—to administer his estate. The will devised that the estate be equally divided among his children, but the executors were to sell enough of

<sup>7</sup> In 1780 Squire Boone, passing through this way (Meade County) in company with a certain John McKinney, discovered at the head of Doe Run a spring which he frequented sundry times. George L. Ridenour: *Early Times in Meade County, Kentucky*, Chapter III. On January 3, 1783, Squire Boone entered 6,000 acres of land on the Ohio River below the mouth of Doe Run. *Early Times in Meade County, Kentucky*, Chapter III. An old stone mill erected a century ago on Doe Run Creek has been converted into a resort hotel, and is today one of Kentucky's picturesque attractions.

<sup>8</sup> The counties of Meade, Breckinridge, and LaRue were organized from part of the original territory included in Hardin County. The present area is 606 square miles, the fourth largest in the State. Leroy Martin: *Facts about Elizabethtown and a Few Things about Hardin County*. Martin's booklet, 104 pages, was issued by "The Enterprise and Progressive Business Men of the City," published in 1923 by the Enterprise Printery, Elizabethtown.

<sup>9</sup> Fifty-one years after the death of John LaRue (II), numerous citizens of the southeastern part of the large county of Hardin petitioned the Legislature of Kentucky for the establishment of a new county, which they asked should be

his other property and lands, which he had not previously devised, to discharge his lawful debts. James Buchanan did not buy the LaRue tracts from the executors of LaRue, but they had been sold to several other parties before he became one of the purchasers.

The amount required to settle the lawful debts of John LaRue amounted to twenty-seven pounds, yet the executors had sold slaves and lands much in excess of the amount of debts. The heirs of LaRue brought suit against the executors for the recovery of the land, stating that the land and slaves should not have been sold and that they had acted without due authority in selling the property at a sacrifice in price and without necessity. This litigation started in the year 1803 and continued for many years in the Hardin County Court.

Samuel Haycraft, Jr., in his original manuscript of the *History of Elizabethtown* stated, under the heading of March Term, Hardin County Court, dated March 8, 1813, that several land suits in the names of James Buchanan and James Dickey were then on the docket. The plaintiff, James Buchanan, he further asserts, was the father of James Buchanan (the future president). At this point in the manuscript there appears a note, "See James Buchanan," indicating that a further discussion of Buchanan occurred in other writings of his. Haycraft at the time of this court term was eighteen years of age, which would make it reasonably certain that his statement was made from first-hand knowledge and information."

Buchanan was elected to the presidency in the fall of the year 1856, and Haycraft wrote his history about twelve years later. Little attention was paid to the Buchanan land litigation at this

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called Lynn, with Hodgenville as its county seat. The act creating the county was approved March 4, 1843, but at the suggestion of John LaRue Helm, who was at that time influential in the politics of the State, he having previously served several years as Speaker of the House of Representatives, the name Lynn was rejected, and the new county was called LaRue. This name may have been given partly in recognition of the numerous LaRues who were living or who had lived within the territory cut off from Hardin County, but it was more particularly for Governor Helm's grandfather, John LaRue. Otis M. Mather: *Six Generations of LaRues and Allied Families*, page 83.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Haycraft (Jr.) was born August 14, 1795. Haycraft's *History of Elizabethtown, Kentucky*. Samuel Haycraft (Jr.) of Elizabethtown is a witness of the highest possible credibility. No more esteemed and trusted man lived in Hardin County, where he was clerk of both County and Circuit courts from 1816 to 1857, inclusive, a member of the Kentucky State Senate and "one of the most determined supporters of the Union." Haycraft knew personally those of whom he writes and was a staunch friend of President Lincoln. Weik MSS. Beveridge: *Abraham Lincoln*, page 5.

early period. However, after the son had achieved fame, it is most likely that many citizens recalled the then future president's residence in Elizabethtown and the numerous land suits in which his father had engaged endeavoring to clear property titles. A manuscript from the papers of Haycraft show that in the year 1815 the suit was again before the court, as an order was drawn by the County Court Clerk for money to be paid to John Helm, a witness, which is as follows:

Hardin Circuit Court, September Term, 1815.

"Ordered that William A. Clark, James Payne, Minor Lewright, Ally Overall, and Thomas Lewis pay unto John Helm the sum of one pound, eight shillings and four pence for attending this court term five days as a witness for them at the suit of James Dickey and James Buchanan and travelling forty miles and returning the same distance."

A Copy Test,

Ben Helm, C. H. C. C."

The fact that John Helm, the surveyor, was summoned before the court would indicate that he was the surveyor of the lands in question. Owing to his education and his training for this work, he was considered one of the best in the profession, and because of his varied activities his life in the early nineteenth century in Hardin County was one constantly fraught with excitement and danger."

These land suits which began in the year 1803 were twice carried to the Court of Appeals of Kentucky, as reported in Volume II, *Littell's Reports*, page 258, under the case LaRue vs. LaRue, and in Volume III, *J. J. Marshall's Reports*, page 156, under the case of LaRue Heirs vs. LaRue Executors.

So persistent was the elder Buchanan in his attempts to clear his land titles and save his investments that he sent his son to Kentucky to represent his interests. The son, a young lawyer, probably did all that was within his power to effect a clear and decisive settlement, but it is not to be supposed that, with the departure of Lawyer James Buchanan from Elizabethtown, that the property of James Buchanan, Sr., and his partners had clear titles." The maze of court entanglements had so engulfed these holdings that it is doubtful if any one of the persons concerned

<sup>11</sup> Haycraft Manuscripts, Warren Files, Lincoln National Life Foundation.

<sup>12</sup> Haycraft's *History of Elizabethtown, Kentucky*, page 46.

<sup>13</sup> When James Buchanan, the future president, left Elizabethtown, Kentucky, he made Ben Hardin his attorney at law and attorney in fact. Lucius P. Little: *Ben Hardin, His Times and Contemporaries*, page 353.

in the suits could foretell the outcome. Possibly the unusually active fight put forth by Buchanan and his partners during the early title difficulties was largely responsible for the long drawn out litigation.

Hardin County Court Records (Deed Book H, page 413) show that the three partners by an agreement decided to hold their lands as tenants in common and not as joint tenants. Upon the death of Robert Johnson deeds dated June 8, 1809, were made partitioning the land to the executors of Johnson and to Buchanan and Dickey.

Due to difficulties which arose concerning this land by reason of adverse claims, an agreement was made with Charles Campbell, one of the original owners, to re-convey to him their tracts in Hardin County for an amount of cash totaling \$1,454.47 and a deed to lands in Westmoreland County in Pennsylvania. This deed is dated March 15, 1821, and includes the names of James Buchanan, Sr., and Elizabeth (Speer) Buchanan, mother of James Buchanan, the president.<sup>14</sup> The deed was recorded by Samuel Haycraft, Jr., the clerk of the Hardin County Court, on February 5, 1823.

It was in the fall term of court, 1822, that the case LaRue vs. LaRue was decreed as related in *Littell's Reports*. In January, 1830, *Marshall's Reports* state that the case was appealed from a judgment of the Nelson Circuit Court. The result of the suit was that the heirs of LaRue were to receive the money due them from the executors, but the titles to the land in question were not to be affected, thereby forever settling and clearing the property titles of the Buchanan, Dickey, and Johnson lands which had been sold previous to this decree.

Although it is reasonable to suppose that the Buchanans, due to increased land values, sold their property in 1821 at a considerably higher price than its initial cost, it is not probable that they realized any real profit on their investments in Hardin County because of the expense which was very likely incurred in defending their rights to the property. It is, however, an interesting historical fact that both the father of the fifteenth

<sup>14</sup> James Buchanan, Sr., died in Franklin County, Pennsylvania, in 1821, leaving issue by his wife, Elizabeth Speer (whom he married in Adams County, Pennsylvania), as follows: (1) James, (2) William Speer, (3) George W., (4) Edward Young, (5) Jane \_\_\_\_\_; according to Carleton H. Miller there were other daughters, Mrs. Harriett B. Henry and Mrs. Maria Yates. Browning's *Americans of Royal Descent* (1882), pages 48-49.

and the father of the sixteenth president of the United States owned property within the limits of Hardin County and that both were constantly engaged in court proceedings endeavoring to protect their interests.

Due to the intensity of the legal battles concerning the Buchanan, Dickey, and Johnson properties, the elder Buchanan's son, who had a few years before completed a legal education, came to Elizabethtown to represent his father's interests in these numerous land suits. Possibly the trip appealed to young Buchanan as an opportunity for excitement and adventure as well as a chance to practice his profession in a new country which afforded excellent possibilities for advancement. In the numerous Haycraft manuscripts there is to be found in faded handwriting an account of the trip of James Buchanan, Jr., to Kentucky, which is as follows: "Late President Buchanan about the year 1813 or 1814 came to Kentucky, coming down the Ohio in a flatboat with Major James Crutcher and Thomas S. Crutcher with their goods."<sup>15</sup>

This account was possibly written by Haycraft one year after the death of President Buchanan, as his death occurred in the year 1868 and Haycraft wrote his history in 1869. Possibly the death of Buchanan recalled to Haycraft's mind the residence in Elizabethtown of the future president. The appearance of the manuscript indicates that he intended to give additional information, but for some reason it was never added.

Like many early pioneers the future fifteenth president came to Kentucky by water route, on a flatboat. Major James Crutcher and his son, Thomas S. Crutcher, made frequent trips to Pennsylvania to purchase goods for their store in Elizabethtown, and young Buchanan likely was able to contact them through the wholesale house from which the Crutchers purchased their merchandise.<sup>16</sup> Such a trip into the unsettled State of Kentucky, even as late as 1813, was more or less hazardous, not because of the Indians but on account of river pirates and robbers that were usually encountered on the trip.

Undoubtedly Major Crutcher and his son were very glad to accommodate young Buchanan by bringing him to Kentucky, because he not only made an extra hand and guard but the civic

<sup>15</sup> Haycraft Manuscripts, Warren Files, Lincoln National Life Foundation.

<sup>16</sup> Haycraft's *History of Elizabethtown, Kentucky*, pages 98-99.

interest of this Elizabethtown resident probably foresaw in Buchanan a permanent resident. Returning to the West from one of these trips, Major Crutcher met a young man at Martinsburg, Virginia, named Horatio Gates Wintersmith, and prevailed on him to come to Kentucky. Wintersmith, unlike Buchanan, became a permanent resident of Elizabethtown.<sup>17</sup>

It is not known definitely whether young Buchanan intended to make his home in the Western Country or whether he came to Kentucky merely to protect his father's interests. It is likely that he was undecided as to his future residence, and, if the town appealed to him, he probably intended to stay. Statements by him and Ben Hardin made several years later seem to indicate that he intended to stay. As he was admitted to the bar to practice law on November 17, 1812, it is probable that he would seek a new country where competition would not be so great.<sup>18</sup>

The trip of this young Pennsylvanian down the Ohio was probably a very pleasant experience. The river course was exceedingly beautiful, and the frontier setting likely appealed to him. According to Haycraft, Major Crutcher and all the merchants living in the southern counties of Kentucky docked their flatboats at the mouth of Salt River on the Hardin County bank.<sup>19</sup> From Salt River young Buchanan would travel the last twenty-five miles of his journey on a wagon loaded with merchandise, passing into the Knob Country with its picturesque Muldraugh's Hill and completing, upon his arrival at Elizabethtown, the long journey from Pennsylvania.<sup>20</sup>

Upon arriving at the frontier community of Elizabethtown, it is probable that young Buchanan made his home with Major

<sup>17</sup> Haycraft's *History of Elizabethtown, Kentucky*, page 106.

<sup>18</sup> R. G. Horton: *Life and Public Services of James Buchanan*, page 17.

<sup>19</sup> Haycraft's *History of Elizabethtown, Kentucky*, page 99.

<sup>20</sup> It is said that the expression "Going up Salt River" for defeated candidates grew out of a tradition that Henry Clay went up that river in a steamboat to have a game of poker and missed his speaking appointment in consequence, and thus lost the presidency.

Bayard Taylor, who visited Kentucky in 1855, undertook to learn the origin of the phrase "Going up Salt River." The explanation he received and published in his *At Home and Abroad* was that in earlier days the salt makers up Salt River bore a reputation for rowdiness that made them the terror of all the surrounding country. Whenever a flatboatman on the Ohio became unruly, his mates would promptly subdue him with a threat to send him up Salt River and turn him over to the tender mercies of the salt makers. Taylor says that the phrase first acquired political significance about 1840, but he makes no mention of Henry Clay in this connection. Samuel G. Boyd: *The Louisville and Nashville Turnpike, The Register of the Kentucky State Historical Society*, May, 1926. Read before The Filson Club, November 2, 1925.

Crutcher, for, in addition to being a merchant, he was also a tavern keeper. He was a very distinguished Kentuckian who, during his career, was a justice of the peace, a judge of the quarter session court, a trustee of the town, a trustee of an academy, and a representative, and a senator in the Kentucky Legislature. In such a home it is likely Buchanan's residence was made very enjoyable.<sup>21</sup>

In spite of his youth the young Pennsylvanian's fine appearance, courteous manner, and excellent education, in addition to the fact that he was a member of the bar of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, made him quite an asset to the community. Little did the citizens of Elizabethtown dream that he would become the fifteenth president of the United States, and that residing about twenty miles away on Knob Creek was a small boy four years of age who would become the sixteenth president, succeeding him to that office.<sup>22</sup>

Elizabethtown probably presented to Buchanan a very strange and picturesque frontier appearance. The town had been founded in the year 1793 by Colonel Andrew Hynes and named in honor of his wife, Elizabeth. Here was located the seat of justice, but the town did not prove of rapid growth as the third census credited the village in the year 1810 with only one hundred and eighty inhabitants.<sup>23</sup> However, at this early period in Kentucky history this community was a scene of much activity. Its people were ambitious, as is evidenced by the greatness that some of its citizens achieved. Social life was developed to a high degree and schools were established, provided in most cases with excellent teachers.<sup>24</sup> The village was not an unattrac-

<sup>21</sup> The second brick residence to be erected in Elizabethtown was the home of Major James Crutcher. It stood in the west angle of the public square and was two stories high, well finished with a set of marble steps in front, being superior in material and finish to anything of the kind erected during the following sixty years. This house was the hospitable mansion of the major until about 1818. Haycraft's *History of Elizabethtown, Kentucky*, page 77.

<sup>22</sup> Lincoln, in a letter written in 1860 to Samuel Haycraft, Jr., says: "The place on Knob Creek, mentioned by Mr. Read, I remember very well." Nicolay and Hay: *Abraham Lincoln, Complete Works*, Vol. 6, page 39.

<sup>23</sup> Lucius P. Little: *Ben Hardin, His Times and Contemporaries*, page 31.

The population of Hardin County was between eight and ten thousand in 1810, the land laws having been modified and settlement encouraged in every way possible. By the year 1816 half a million people had settled in Kentucky, and this number was constantly increasing. Beveridge: *Abraham Lincoln*, Vol. 1, pages 32-33.

<sup>24</sup> General Duff Green, an early Elizabethtown school teacher, married Lucretia Edwards, an aunt of Ninian Wirt Edwards, who was a brother-in-law of Abraham Lincoln. He lived in the same house in Elizabethtown in which Thomas

tive settlement inhabited by poor and miserable people, but comprised largely of good families from some of the more advanced sections of the Eastern and Southern States.

In this early period the majority of the houses were of log construction, but many of these houses were unusually spacious and made of large hewn logs. Two large brick residences created an imposing appearance. In addition to these, several frame structures had been built. A stone jail, expensive for that day, and a new court house were in use, and the little town also boasted of a brick yard, a tannery, a distillery, and three stores, one of which was owned and operated for a short time by John James Audubon, the great ornithologist.<sup>25</sup> There were several blacksmiths and gunsmiths, a shoemaker, a tailor, and a dancing master residing in the town. Costumes of the frontier still prevailed, but here and there were to be seen—among the buckskin leggings, hunting shirts, coon skin caps, and moccasins—a few beaver hats, short breeches, low shoes with silver buckles, and knee buckles.

The first record of Thomas Lincoln, the father of Abraham, in Elizabethtown is in 1796, three years after the town was established.<sup>26</sup> Documentary evidence, through court records and early manuscripts, shows that Thomas Lincoln resided permanently in Elizabethtown from about 1803 to 1808. On June 12, 1806, Thomas Lincoln married Nancy Hanks in Washington County, and with his bride immediately returned to Elizabethtown to reside. In February of the following year the couple's first child, Sarah, was born.

Little Abraham, who was born February 12, 1809, on the South Fork farm, very probably came to the county seat with his father on county court days. Documentary evidence has established the fact that Abraham Lincoln passed through Elizabethtown when the Lincoln family migrated to Indiana in the year 1816.<sup>27</sup>

It is not at all unlikely that in this small community James Buchanan knew Thomas Lincoln casually, as Lincoln was defend-

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Lincoln was married to Sarah Bush Johnston. General Green became very influential in national politics during the administration of Andrew Jackson, becoming a member of the famous "Kitchen Cabinet."

<sup>25</sup> Haycraft's *History of Elizabethtown, Kentucky*, page 108.

<sup>26</sup> *Lincoln Lore*, Fort Wayne, Indiana. No. 44.

<sup>27</sup> Louis A. Warren: *Lincoln's Parentage and Childhood*, page 292.

ing his property titles in the September, 1813, term of court, and Buchanan, being a lawyer, frequented the court house. It is not improbable that Buchanan could have seen little Abe, but due to the difference of their age and station in life, it is unlikely that any notice was paid by him to the future sixteenth president. Sarah Bush Johnston, who was to become the stepmother of Abraham Lincoln, was at this time the wife of Daniel Johnston, jailer of Hardin County. As it was the duty of the jailer to keep the court house in order, his wife assumed the duty in this case, and no doubt James Buchanan many times observed this industrious woman as she went about her daily task of cleaning and caring for the building.

A careful study of documentary evidence and Buchanan biographies indicates that he resided in Elizabethtown in the year 1813. R. G. Horton, in his *Campaign Biography of Buchanan*, written in 1856, states that James Buchanan, Jr., was admitted to the bar November 17, 1812, when he was a little over twenty-one years of age. Horton further continues regarding Buchanan's ability as a lawyer with the following comments:

"He came to the bar of his native state when Pennsylvania was distinguished far and wide for the superior ability of her lawyers. She could boast then of her Baldwins, her Gibsons, her Rosses, her Duncans, her Breckinridges, her Dallasses and her Semples, who shed not only honor upon their own state but who added materially to the legal reputation of the whole country. With such men as these Mr. Buchanan was compelled to struggle for that eminence in his profession which he subsequently attained and so firmly kept. Perhaps we do not go too far in saying that there never has been so rapid a rise in the legal profession as that afforded in his case."<sup>28</sup>

His election as a member of the House of Representatives of Pennsylvania in 1814 would rather substantiate the fact that his residence in Kentucky could not have been of long duration and did not extend into the year 1814.<sup>29</sup>

The fact that Haycraft mentions the Buchanan case in the 1813 March Term of Hardin County Court, in his original manuscript of the *History of Elizabethtown*, might indicate that unusual pressure was brought to bear by the plaintiff under the guidance of the son and attorney of the plaintiff, and that the year of his Elizabethtown residence was 1813.

<sup>28</sup> R. G. Horton: *Life and Public Services of James Buchanan*, page 17.

<sup>29</sup> R. G. Horton: *Life and Public Services of James Buchanan*, page 22.

When Buchanan represented his father's interests in these land suits, he was forced to oppose, at the age of twenty-two years with only about one year's experience, some of the finest lawyers in America. Samuel Haycraft in his history states that "By 1806 twenty-two lawyers had been admitted to the Hardin County bar."<sup>30</sup> Among these were Felix Grundy, afterward senator from Tennessee; Ninian Edwards, afterward governor of Illinois; Thomas B. Reed, afterward senator from Mississippi; Henry P. Brodnax; John Rowan; John Pope; and Robert Wickliffe. Haycraft observes of certain lawyers who practiced at Elizabethtown that any of them were "far ahead in legal knowledge, statesmanship, and administrative capacity of some of our presidents."<sup>31</sup>

Ben Hardin, who was a noted lawyer and one of the most interesting characters in Kentucky history during the first half of the nineteenth century, resided for a while in Elizabethtown, and practiced for many years before the Elizabethtown bar. In Hardin's biography, written by Lucius P. Little, the following information is given concerning Buchanan in Elizabethtown:

"Before Horace Greeley had advised the 'young man' to 'go west,' ex-President Buchanan forsook his Pennsylvania home and came to Kentucky. 'I recollect very well,' said Mr. Hardin, in 1849, 'that some thirty-seven or thirty-eight years ago the celebrated James Buchanan, late Secretary of State under Mr. Polk, commenced the practice of law in the town of Elizabeth. There I became acquainted with him, and at that time I discovered in him a man of fine education and respectable talents.

<sup>30</sup> Albert J. Beveridge: *Abraham Lincoln*, page 19, Note No. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Ninian Edwards was the father of Ninian Wirt Edwards, the brother-in-law of Abraham Lincoln.

Henry P. Brodnax dressed in white cassemere, short breeches, silver buckles . . . and very fine cotton stockings, and a long white ribbed dimity coat, the long skirts of which nearly touched the ground. In his will he appropriated \$20,000 to the Brodnax Professorship in the Theological Seminary at Danville. Haycraft's *History of Elizabethtown, Kentucky*, pages 178-179.

John Rowan became one of the leading lawyers of his time and a United States senator from Kentucky. He lived near Bardstown many years and later removed to Louisville, but retained his Bardstown place as a country home. There is an old tradition that it was at his old Bardstown home that the song, "My Old Kentucky Home," was written by Stephen Collins Foster, a cousin of Rowan. Foster's sister, Ann Elizabeth, in 1833 married Edward Young Buchanan, a brother of President James Buchanan.

John Pope was a senator in Congress from Kentucky from 1807 to 1812, acting a part of the time as president pro tem of that body. In 1829 he was appointed governor of Arkansas. He served as a representative in Congress from 1836 to 1843.

Robert Wickliffe was admitted to the Elizabethtown bar in the year 1802, becoming one of its first members.

Haycraft's *History of Elizabethtown, Kentucky*, pages 45 and 174.

In the course of a few months he began to look unhappy, and as if he was experiencing some disappointment. His father had given him a large landed estate in Hardin County, about which there was some difficulty. At length he made me his attorney at law and attorney in fact, and went back and settled in Pennsylvania, where he was raised. Ten or fifteen years afterward I met him in Congress, and over and over again have we laughed when he told me this story:

“‘I went to Kentucky,’ he said, ‘expecting to be a great man there, but every lawyer I met at the bar was my equal, and more than half of them my superiors, so I gave it up.’”<sup>32</sup>

The Ben Hardin biography also contains Buchanan’s description of Hardin’s personal appearance: “Ex-President Buchanan spoke of seeing him on one occasion, at an early period of life, thus arrayed at Elizabethtown, the material of his apparel being linen, of home manufacture.”<sup>33</sup>

As to Buchanan’s success as a lawyer in Elizabethtown, the following account found in Collins’ *History of Kentucky* clearly shows that the Elizabethtown bar was no place for a novice:

“At the first term of court after his arrival, among other visiting lawyers was Ben Hardin—dressed in a suit of unbleached tow linen, its clumsy fit helping to give the wearer quite a clownish appearance. Buchanan was surprised to see him take a seat among the lawyers. On the third day of the term a case was called, in which the pleadings were very intricate and after the strictest English forms before the days of Chitty. His wonder grew that such a looking man as Hardin had the depth and grasp to grapple with such a case; but when he heard him argue it with a clearness, and tact, and power that evinced a master-spirit, he retired from the court house and prepared to abandon his new home—remarking to himself that if such looking men as Ben Hardin were so smart in Kentucky, there was a better opening for him in his old Pennsylvania home.”<sup>34</sup>

The duration of Buchanan’s stay in Kentucky is not definite, but it is more than likely that he resided in Elizabethtown for several months. Due to the slow processes of the law and court procedure, it was undoubtedly necessary for him to stay there long enough to attend to his father’s land interests. Ben Hardin’s statement that “in the course of a few months he began to look unhappy” would indicate that his residence extended over a period of several months. Just when and how he departed for

<sup>32</sup> Lucius P. Little: *Ben Hardin, His Times and Contemporaries*, pages 352, 353.

<sup>33</sup> Lucius P. Little: *Ben Hardin, His Times and Contemporaries*, page 560.

<sup>34</sup> Collins’ *History of Kentucky*, Vol. II, page 310. Chapter on Hardin County.

Pennsylvania is now not known, but it would have been the natural thing for him to join some party going to the East. Possibly he accompanied Major James Crutcher on an eastern trip for merchandise, taking the land route on horseback, as was the custom of many merchants traveling to the eastern markets.

Buchanan's life from this period on, to the time of his election to the presidency and through the presidency, likewise his retirement after the election of Lincoln, is well known to historians and many others.

Due to the lack of documentary evidence concerning Buchanan in 1813, most of his biographers mention nothing concerning his life or his trip to Kentucky during that year. The present generation, in its intensive study of Lincoln's life, should find early Hardin County of especial historical interest, due to the fact that the two future Presidents who were destined to play prominent parts in the most critical period thus far of the Nation's existence, lived in the same community in Kentucky, less than one hundred miles from the birthplace of Jefferson Davis, the president of the Confederacy.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Jefferson Davis was born June 3, 1808, in that part of Christian County, Kentucky, which now forms Todd County.









